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The Crew!

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The ATA class

These are the kids that make my life interesting every single day of the school year. ATA officially stands for Advanced Technology Applications, an eighth grade elective offered in our middle school. This is only the second year the course has been offered, and it is a whole new world every day!

ATA=Advanced Technology Applications. But what else does ATA stand for? "Attention: Teenagers Abound," "Active, Talkative Adolescents," "Always Teaching an Adult" (that would be me), "Aggravation Turned Awry"?

They were a blank canvas when we started in August, and I've had so much fun watching them grow and develop. They have moved from being static learners, wanting me to tell them step-by-step what to do, to being the owners of their learning. **They** decide what they will tackle on any given day, sometimes individually, sometimes collectively. At the beginning of the year, I gave them a copy of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) we were expected to cover during the year. They keep these in folders at their workstations and refer to them from time to time.

I give global projects, intended to cover specific TEKS, and they take the ideas and run with them. We have a composer in class...need some music for your presentation on White Space Usage? JustinV might want some assistance with inserting a link in his web page project and will gladly make a trade with you. Having trouble getting an image to behave? Jess and JustinB are quite adept at using [picnik.com](#). Looking for an original design to use in a project, but your eyes are too tired to look at pixels? Ask our [Inkscape](#) pro, Luby. Devin handles most of the scanning of original artwork, while (whether he likes it or not) William can help you tame your tables in HTML. Megan can help you find the timestamps for music you want to edit from your media player, and Kat will help you with overall design. Jonathan can check your HTML for errors and help you figure out why your link isn't working; Brandon will help you get data entered when your fingers are just too tired to type anymore. James is a whiz at moving files across the network or via thumb drive, and Kait is an expert at looking over your shoulder and helping you troubleshoot just about anything your computer decides to do to you (always at the worst possible time!).

Did I assign these roles? Of course not! Did they come into the class knowing what they were good at? Probably not. Have I listed everything each student excels in? Not by a long shot. "Just in time" teaching, "Just in time" learning - and all provided by the community. I'm a member of the community, suggesting ways things "might" work or helping find possible solutions to a knotty problem, but what you **don't** hear in the classroom is a constant chorus of, "Miss?!?! What do I do?" They turn to each other, they go to our online classroom at [Tapped In](#) and ask an expert there, they ask me to contact one of the guest speakers we've talked with at Tapped In...and once in a while they ask me for help.

Other teachers wander into the classroom and wonder what on earth is going on, I suspect. The kids are all over the place, moving around the room, sometimes all crowded around one computer to see a new project taking shape, sometimes half of them are trying to train MSWord to understand speech so they can dictate. Cheers go up when someone announces success. They share and consult, work as a group and as individuals. Headphones and thumb drives (including mine) are common property for the duration of class. And when there is a cry of anguish as something goes wrong, there is a loud chorus of "Control Z, Control Z — and SAVE it this time!"

Perhaps ATA stands for "Applying Teaching Actively."

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